

inge brid that singeth on the heye braunches, that is to seyn, in the wode, and after is enclosed in a streyt cage: although that the pleyinge bisnesse of men yeveth hem honiede drinkes & large metes with swete studie, yif natheles, yif thilke brid, skip-pinge out of hir streyte cage, seeth the agreables shadewes of the wodes, she defoulet with hir feet hir metes yshad, and seketh mourninge only the wode; & twittereth, desiringe the wode, with hir swete vois. The yerde of a tree, that is haled adoun by mighty strengthe, boweth redily the crop adoun: but yif that the hand of him that it bente lat it gon ayein, anon the crop loketh upright to hevenc. The sonne Phebus, that falleth at even in the west-rene wawes, retorneth ayein eftsones his carte, by privee path, theras it is wont aryse. Alle thinges seken ayein to hir propre cours, and alle thinges rejoysen hem of hir retorninge ayein to hir nature. Ne non ordinaunce nis bitaken to thinges, but that that hath joyned the endinge to the beginninge, and hath makid the cours of itself stable, that it chaungeth nat from his propre kinde.

Prose III.

Vos quoque, o terrena animalia.



ISTE also ye men, that ben erthe-liche beestes, dremen alwey youre beginninge, although it be with a thinne imaginacioun; & by a maner thoughte, albe it nat cleerly ne parfitly, ye loken fram afer to thilke verray fyn of blisfulnesse; & therefore naturel entencioum ledeth you to thilke verray good, but many maner errours mistorneth you therfro. Consider now yif that by thilke thinges, by whiche a man weneth to geten him blisfulnesse, yif that he may comen to thilke ende that he weneth to come by nature. for yif that moneye or honours, or thise other forseyde thinges bringen to men swich a thing that no goodne fayle hem ne semeth fayle, certes than wole I graunte that they ben makid blisful by thilke thinges that they han geten. But yif so be that thilke thinges ne mowen nat performen that they biheten, and that ther be defaute of manye goodes, sheweth it nat thanne cleerly that fals beautee of blisfulnesse is known and a-teint in thilke thinges? first and forward thou thyself, that haddest habundaunces of riches nat long ago, I axe yif that, in the habundaunce of alle thilke riches, thou were never anguissous or sorry in thy

corage of any wrong or grevaunce that bitidde thee on any syde?

CERTES, quod I, it ne remembreth me nat that evere I was so free of my thought that I ne was alwey in anguiss of somwhat.

AND was nat that, quod she, for that theelakked somwhat that thou olddest nat han lakked, or elles thou haddest that thou noldest nat han had? Right so is it, quod I.

THANNE desiredest thou the presence of that oon and the absence of that other? I graunte wel ther somwhat that every man desireth.

Ye, ther nedeth, quod I.

CERTES, quod she, & he that hath lakke or nede of aught nis nat in every wey suffisaunt to himself?

No, quod I.

AND thou, quod she, in al the plente of thy riches haddest thilke lakke of suffisaunce? What elles? quod I.

THANNE may nat riches maken that a man nis nedy, ne that he be suffisaunt to himself; & that he be it that they bihighten, as it semeth. And eek certes I trowe, that this be gretty to considere, that moneye ne hath nat in his owne kinde that it ne may ben binomen of hem that han it, maugre hem? I biknowe it wel, quod I.

WHY sholdest thou nat biknowen it, quod she, when every day the stronger folk binemen it fro the febler, maugre hem? for whennes comen elles alle thise foreyne compleyntes or quereles of pletinges, but for that men axen ayein here moneye that hath ben binomen hem by force or by gyle, and alwey maugre hem? Right so is it, quod I.

THAN, quod she, hath a man nede to seken him foreyne helpe by whiche he may defende his moneye? Who may sey nay? quod I.

CERTES, quod she; & him nedede non help, yif he ne haddene moneye that he mighte lese? That is douteles, quod I.

THAN is this thinge torned into the contrarye, quod she, for riches, that men wenen sholde make suffisaunce, they maken a man rather han nede of foreyne help? Which is the manere of the gyse, quod she, that riches may dryve away nede? Riche folk, may they neither han hunger ne thirst? Thise riche men, may they fele no cold on hir limes on winter? But thou wolt answeren, that riche men han ynowherwith they may staunchen hir hunger, slaken hir thirst, and don away cold. In this wyse may nede be com-

forted by riches; but certes, nede ne may nat a loutrely ben don away. for though this nede, that is alwey gapinge and gredy, be fulfilled with riches, & axe any thing, be dwellleth thanne a nede that mighte be fulfilled. I holdem stille, & tellenat how that litel thing suffiseth to nature; but certes to avarice ynough ne suffiseth nothing. for sin that riches ne may nat al don away nede, but riches maken nede, what may it thanne be, that ye wenen that riches mowen yeven you suffisaunce?

Metre III.

Quamvis fluente dives auri gurgite.

IF were it so that a riche coveytous man hadde a river flettinge al of gold, yif sholde it never staunchen his coveitise; and though he hadde his nekke ycharged with precious stones of the rede see, and though he do ere his feldes plentivous with an hundred oxen, never ne shal his bytinge bisnesse forleten him whyl he liveth, ne the lighte riches ne sholle nat beren him companye whan he is ded.

Prose IV.

Set dignitates.



DIGNITEES, to whom they ben comen, maken they him honorable & reverent? Han they nat so gret strengthe, that they may putte vertues in the hertes of folk that usen the lordshipes of hem? Or elles may they don away the vyces? Certes, they ne benat wont to don away wikkednesse, but they ben wont rather to shewen wikkednesse. And therof comth it that I have right grette dedeyn, that dignitees ben yeven ofteto wikked men; for which thing Catullus cleped a consul of Rome, that highte Nonius, Postum or Boch; as who seyth, he cleped him a congregacioun of vyces in his brest, as a postum is ful of corupecioun, al were this Nonius set in a chayre of dignitee. Seest thou nat thanne how gret vilenye dignitees don to wikked men? Certes, unworthinesse of wikked men sholde be the lasse ysene, yif they nere renommed of none honours. Certes, thou thyself ne mightest nat ben brought with as manye perils as thou mightest suffren that thou woldest beren the magistrat with Decorat; that is to seyn, that for no peril that mighte befallen thee by offence of the king Theodorike, thou noldest nat be felawe in governaunce with Decorat; whan thou saye

that he hadde wikked corage of a likerous shrewe and of an accusor. Ne I ne may nat, for swiche honours, jugen hem worthy of reverence, that I deme and holde unworthy to han thilke same honours. Now yif thou saye a man that were fulfilled of wisdom, certes, thou ne mightest nat deme that he were unworthy to the honour, or elles to the wisdom of which he is fulfilled? No, quod I. Certes, dignitees, quod she, appertienen proprely to vertu; & vertu transporteth dignitee anon to thilke man to which she herself is conjoined. And for as moche as honours of poeple ne may nat maken folk digne of honour, it is wel seyn cleerly that they ne han no propre beautee of dignitee. And yit men oughten taken more heed in this. for yif it so be that a wikked wight besomochel the foulere and the more outcast, that he is despyssed of most folk, so as dignitee ne may nat maken shrewes digne of reverence, the which shrewes dignitee sheweth to moche folk, thanne maketh dignitee shrewes rather so moche more despyssed than preysed; and forsothe nat unpunished: that is for to seyn, that shrewes revengen hem ayeinward upon dignitees; for they yilden ayein to dignitees as gret guerdoun, whan they bispotten and defoulen dignitees with hir vilenye. And for as moche as thou mowe knowe that thilke verray reverence ne may nat comen by thise shadewy transitorie dignitees, undirstond now thus: yif that a man hadde used & had many maner dignitees of consules, and were comen peraventure amonge straungenaciouns, sholde thilke honour maken him worshipful and redouted of straunge folk? Certes, yif that honour of poeple were a naturel yift to dignitees, it ne mighte never cesen nowher amonges no maner folk to don his office, right as fyr in every contree nestinteth nat to eschaufen and to ben hoot. But for as moche as for to ben holden honourable or reverent ne cometh nat to folk of hir propre strengthe of nature, but only of the false opinioun of folk, that is to seyn, that wenen that dignitees maken folk digne of honour; anon therfore whan that they comen theras folk ne knowen nat thilke dignitees, hir honours vanisschen away, & that anon. But that is amonges straunge folk, mayst thou seyn; but amonges hem ther they weren born, ne duren nat thilke dignitees alwey? Certes, the dignitee of the provostrie of Rome was whylom a gret power; now is it nothing but an ydel name, & the rente of the senatorie a gret charge. And yif a wight whylom hadde the office to taken hede to the vitales of the poeple, as of corn & other thinges, he was holden amonges grete; but what thing is now more